

how i dearly wish by diogxnes

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Summary:

“Where were you?” asks Hopper.

“Out,” says Steve, “I told you,” because he did. He remembers leaving the house hours ago, just after dinner, telling Hop he was going out with some friends and he’d be back later. He *did* go out with some friends. He *is* back later. He's not entirely sure what the problem is.

But Hopper is glowering at him. “Do you know what time it is?”

how i dearly wish

Author's Note:

- For [birthdaycandles](#).

to fill sarah's prompt: "some kinda steve being taken care of fic....your call who the other party is or what is wrong with him just Steve Suffering And Being Comforted"

to absolutely nobody's surprise, i made the other party hopper

this is sort of meant as a sequel to "[hide on the promenade](#)" but can also be read as a standalone. the only relevant backstory is that steve's parents suck, hopper found out about it, and now steve spends most of his time at the cabin.

cw for references to drinking and abusive parents

title is from "every day is like sunday" by morrissey

It's late when he finally stumbles through the door—that much he knows. It was already late before his memories got fuzzy, so it must be even later now. He doesn't know what time *late* is. It occurs to him, though, that he should attempt to be quiet. Hop and El will be asleep by now.

He shuts the front door behind him, clumsily, and only then does he notice that the light is still on in the living room. He isn't startled—things are far too foggy for him to feel anything approaching shock—so much as just vaguely bemused. It's late. The lights are supposed to be off, when it's late.

"You're late," says Hopper, because Hopper is there: sitting in the armchair, looking at Steve.

He *is* late. He feels a little bit proud of himself for having guessed that much correctly. "Sorry," he says, or thinks he does.

“Where were you?”

Hopper is standing now. Steve missed that transition. Hopper was sitting and now he is standing and nothing seems to have happened in between.

“Out,” says Steve, “I told you,” because he did. He remembers leaving the house hours ago, just after dinner, telling Hop he was going out with some friends and he’d be back later. He *did* go out with some friends. He *is* back later. He’s not entirely sure what the problem is.

But Hopper is glowering at him. “Do you know what time it is?”

“It’s late,” says Steve. He’s pretty sure they’ve already established this.

“Damn right it’s late.”

The chair that Hopper vacated looks incredibly comfortable. Steve begins edging toward it, though there seems, oddly, to be a lot of furniture in the way. Did Hopper buy new furniture while he was out? Steve isn’t sure why he would have. The existing furniture seemed like plenty.

“Yes, I bought new furniture,” Hopper mutters from somewhere behind him. His voice sounds like he did not, in fact, buy new furniture. Then Steve feels rough hands on him, pulling him back upright just as he’s about to sink into the chair. “Absolutely not. You’re going to bed. Now.”

“Alright, *dad*,” says Steve. His tongue feels thick as he says it.

Things get blurrier after that. It all seems to happen in brief, disconnected scenes, like some sort of montage: Hopper guiding him into the bedroom, sitting him down, helping him out of his jacket. Then he’s lying down, suddenly, and wincing as Hopper slams a glass of water down on the nightstand with far more force than seems strictly necessary. *What was that for?* Steve thinks, only apparently it comes out of his mouth, too, because Hopper scowls down at him.

“Don’t think you’re in much of a position to be complaining, here, kid,” he says, and Steve is just sober enough to register how angry he

sounds but far too gone to really process it.

Then the light is out and Hopper has disappeared to the doorway. There's a shape there against the glow from the living room that Steve thinks must be him.

"The pills are for when you wake up," he hears, and then he's out.

—

His head is pounding and the bed smells like Hopper.

Despite the scent, it takes him a moment to figure out where he is—he's only seen the inside of this room once or twice, and never slept in it before. When he does realize, the shame is almost overwhelming.

He can't believe Hopper would give up his bed for him, after what he did last night.

His memory is fuzzy, but he knows Hop must have been pissed. Steve doesn't blame him. He'd be pissed, too, if one of the kids pulled something like that. He hadn't been *trying* to make Hopper angry. It was just—

It had felt good, letting go for one night. Partying like he was sixteen again, like he still cared about any of those people, like he didn't know the things they said about him when they thought he couldn't hear. Or—not good, exactly, but it had been a relief. To drink like the world was ending. To drink like he didn't know the world really *could* end.

He's paying for it now, of course.

At some point, he knows, he's going to have to face Hopper. For now, he just scoops up the pills on the nightstand—hopes to God they're painkillers, and not something else—and washes them down with half the glass of water that he vaguely recalls Hop leaving for him.

He's about to lie back down and sneak a few more guilty minutes of sleep when the curtain Hop's put up in lieu of a door is pulled open. He winces at the scraping of the rings against the metal rod. When he

looks up again, Hopper is standing in the doorway, arms crossed. He looks furious.

Steve's heart sinks.

"So," says Hopper drily, and Steve isn't sure whether his headache is worse than he thought or Hopper's talking more loudly than usual just to make this extra unpleasant. "Have a good night?"

Steve answers without thinking. "Yeah, actually."

Hopper doesn't look surprised at that response, but it does seem to make him even angrier. "Good, I'm glad," he says in a voice that suggests the opposite. "I hope it was worth keeping me up until almost four in the morning wondering where the hell you were."

"I didn't—"

"Get up," says Hopper. "I'm not making breakfast twice."

Breakfast is a tense affair. Hopper stares across at Steve while he slowly chews his French toast and eggs, apparently doing his best to make this as uncomfortable as possible. El glances back and forth between them a few times, clearly confused, but says nothing. Steve wonders how much she knows, whether she was up late enough last night to grow worried too. God, he hopes not. He wonders if she's ever even heard of the concept of getting wasted at a house party and then stumbling home in the middle of the night. Hopper usually has a beer or two with dinner; for all Steve knows, that's the entire extent of her familiarity with drinking. For her sake, he does his best to pretend that he doesn't feel as if his head is splitting in two.

It's a relief when she finally pushes her chair back and stands from the table, moving as if to disappear to her room. "Uh-uh," says Hopper, putting out a hand to stop her passing. "Dishes."

"But—"

"Mike will still be there when you finish your chores."

"Steve could do them," says El hotly, and then her brow furrows as if she's just thought of something. "Why doesn't Steve have chores?"

Hopper turns a faux-thoughtful look on Steve. “He should, shouldn’t he?” But he doesn’t ask Steve to do the dishes. Selfishly, Steve’s relieved, though normally he helps El with all her chores when he’s around even though Hop insists she learn to get them done by herself. He isn’t confident he could stand up right now without having to immediately lunge for the trashcan.

It becomes less of a relief when El actually starts the dishes, because then he’s left alone at the table with Hopper, who’s still just looking at him while eating his breakfast in a very pointed sort of way. He can tell that Hop is gearing up to start some sort of lecture as soon as El has gone.

He thinks it’s dread, as much as the hangover, that’s making him so nauseas.

It was stupid, coming to the cabin so drunk last night. It would have been better to go back to his parents’ house instead—he’s never there more than a couple nights a week, these days, and he doubts they would even have noticed him coming home. He shouldn’t have told Hopper he’d be back—then he wouldn’t have waited up, wouldn’t have worried over him.

Hopper had *worried* over him. He feels sick with guilt. Hopper had cared enough to worry, and now Steve’s gone and pissed him off and ruined everything.

The water stops running and he hears El set the last dish in the drying rack with a clatter. She goes to her room and emerges again almost immediately with her ratty, ancient-looking backpack slung over her shoulder.

“Now can I go?” she asks impatiently.

“Yeah, go ahead,” says Hopper. “Don’t have too much fun.” His tone is still gruff, but his expression softens somewhat when he looks at her. Steve feels his stomach clench. Hop used to look at him like that, too, sometimes. He’d been noticing it more and more lately.

But those days are over now, and it’s entirely his own fault.

El leaves, slamming the cabin door behind her hard enough to make Hopper heave a long-suffering sigh. Normally it would make Steve laugh, tease him about how he brought this upon himself, adopting a teenage girl. Then Hop would smirk and crack some joke about how it's even worse now Steve's here so often and he's got twice as many teenagers on his hands.

Now Steve just feels numb. If Hopper says something about the trouble Steve causes him, it won't be a joke this time.

Hopper gives him a long, hard look, like he's finally about to start speaking. Then, instead, he stands and takes his plate to the sink.

Steve remains where he is as if frozen. Surely Hopper is going to yell at him. At this point, he just wishes he would go ahead and get it over with. If Hopper is going to kick him out, he might as well do it now. It seems needlessly cruel to just let Steve sit here, dreading the inevitable worst.

Then again, maybe that's the point.

Hopper speaks from the sink without turning to look at him. "How did you get home last night?"

It feels like a trick question but Steve can't figure out what the tick is, so he answers honestly. "Walked."

"You walked." Hopper is still washing his plate; it seems like it should be clean by now. "You walked home, drunk, through the woods, at night, alone."

Steve doesn't answer at first, but the silence drags on so long—Hopper still determinedly scrubbing the plate, still not looking at him—that it grows unbearable. "I mean, at least I didn't drive."

"*Dammit*, Steve!" Hopper slams the still-dripping plate down on the counter so hard that Steve flinches, half expecting to feel an impact. "Is this *funny* to you?"

"A little," he snaps, though it isn't.

Hopper bangs his fist down, then takes a deep breath, as if trying to

calm himself. "Look, I can't stop you from being a teenager," he says in a more even voice. "You want to party, you want to drink, fine. But you don't get to be *stupid* about it."

Hopper is right. He's objectively right, and Steve knows this, but he can't help the sudden anger that flares up in him. "You don't get to control what I do."

"Yeah?" snaps Hopper. "Watch me."

Steve pushes himself up from the table. He can feel his hands shaking, but his splitting headache is gone, replaced with adrenaline. "You aren't—"

"I cannot *believe* you would put yourself at risk like that." Hopper's almost yelling now. "You should know better than almost *anyone* how dangerous it could be, wandering around alone like that! I thought you were smarter than this!"

The words sting, but only serve to push Steve further into anger. "I was *fine*," he snarls. "I'm not a little kid, I can handle a fucking stroll through the woods."

"Really? Because you couldn't even walk in a straight line last night. I had to untie your shoes for you."

"I didn't ask you to do—"

Hopper doesn't let him finish. "You spend most of your nights on my couch, you eat my food, you—dammit, you don't get to just screw off and do whatever you want, not if you're going to stay here—"

"Fine, I'll leave then!"

"No, you *won't* leave! You are going to stay right here, since apparently I can't trust you to run off on your own without getting yourself *killed*—god, if you would just—"

"You aren't my *dad*!" Steve shouts.

There's a stunned, ringing silence.

And then Steve bursts into tears.

It surprises himself as much as it does Hopper. He hadn't expected it, hadn't seen it coming; he'd been aware only of his awful, blinding fury, and that, too, he'd been unable to explain. He doesn't know what to do with it. There's nothing much he *can* do, but hide his face in his hands and try to control his breathing.

"Steve." Hopper's voice is softer now, and much closer. He doesn't touch Steve, but something about his presence is tangible—Steve knows without uncovering his face that Hop is hovering, his hands reaching out but not quite making contact. "Whoah, hey. Hey, hey."

"I'm sorry," Steve chokes. He can barely force the words out around the tightness in his chest. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'll leave, I'm sorry—"

Hop's hands are on him then, maneuvering him backwards. Steve goes willingly, though everything in him is screaming that he should be fighting back. He just doesn't have the energy. If Hopper is going to throw him out—at least he's doing it gently, Steve thinks, and not just shoving him out the door. He braces himself for the sound of Hop undoing the locks.

Instead he feels himself being lowered onto the couch.

"Steve," Hop says. "Look at me, please."

There's the telltale squeak of Hopper sitting down on the coffee table. It's how all the important conversations happen in this house—Steve or El on the couch, Hop sitting on the coffee table to face them. Something about that puts Steve at ease a bit, at least enough to do as Hopper asked and pull his hands away from his face.

All of the anger is gone from Hop's expression, replaced with what Steve knows by now to be concern, though the two look very similar on him. He's frowning, but it's a different sort of frown from just a minute ago. "What's this about, huh?"

Steve tries to speak, finds he doesn't have enough air in his lungs to form words, takes a deep breath instead. Tries again. "I..."

He feels embarrassed, suddenly, by his reaction, and bows his head to

fix his eyes on his lap. It's not as if this is his first time being kicked out. And, God—his dad kicked him out *because* he was acting like this. *Like a pussy*, his dad had said. Clearly he hasn't learned his lesson. And now he's about to get the same thing from Hopper, too.

He doesn't realize how his breathing has picked up until he feels Hop's hand on his knee. "Deep breath, kid. Come on. In and out, you can do it."

The patience in Hop's voice makes fresh tears well up in his eyes. He can't believe he's about to lose this. And all because he'd decided to go out and party with a bunch of people he doesn't even care about and then he'd come home drunk and he'd been so *stupid*—

"Steve, listen to me, okay? What you did wasn't okay. I *know* stuff like this happens sometimes. But you just—just *call* me next time, alright? Don't leave me waiting up all night thinking that you've—I don't know, gotten hurt, or been taken by something, or worse."

It occurs to Steve for the first time since he woke up this morning that maybe, just maybe, Hopper isn't gearing up to kick him out of the house. His heart leaps with a dangerous hope that he tries quickly to suppress, in case he's wrong. "You're not..." He clears his throat. He's afraid to ask the question, but can't stand not knowing for sure. "You're not kicking me out?"

"Kicking you out?" Hopper looks so genuinely baffled that, under different circumstances, Steve would have laughed. "Why the hell would I be kicking you out?"

"Because I...you know."

"Jesus," Hopper mutters, looking briefly furious again. He doesn't say anything else for a long few seconds, so long that Steve worries, despite the evidence to the contrary, that the renewed anger is directed at him. Before he can start spiraling about it, though, Hopper meets his eyes again. "I'm sorry I yelled, kid," he says softly. "I shouldn't have let things escalate like that. I don't ever want you to think...I'm not gonna kick you to the curb just for making a mistake. And I'm certainly not gonna hurt you."

Steve feels the lump returning to his throat, but for an entirely different reason now. “You’re not mad?” he whispers. It’s a stupid question. He knows even as he says it how childish it sounds. But he can’t help himself.

“Of course I’m *mad*, kid,” snaps Hopper, and Steve flinches, but then Hopper squeezes his knee and when he continues it’s in a quieter, gentler voice. “I’m furious with you. You know how worried I was and you know damn well why. And I’m disappointed in you for doing something so stupid. But none of that means that I don’t love you.”

The words hit Steve like a hard shove to the chest, like a fall that’s knocked the wind out of him. He stares back at Hopper, not sure if he’s unable to breathe or just unwilling to, for fear that any movement will somehow undo what’s just been said.

Hopper is staring back. He looks almost as startled as Steve feels. Eventually, he clears his throat. “I, uh.” His voice comes out just a little bit gruffer than usual. “I care about you, kid. So, so much. I just don’t want you to get hurt. You understand that, right?”

Steve nods hesitantly, feeling almost as if someone other than himself is controlling the movement.

“Look, Steve...” Hopper leans forward a bit, serious. “I know I’m not your dad. I’m not trying to be. But you’ve all but moved in here, kid—which is *fine*, that’s not the problem, you know I’m happy to have you around—but there’s gotta be some ground rules. Okay? Like, you can’t be out that late without letting me know. And if you can’t drive home, you call me and I’ll come pick you up.”

Those aren’t unreasonable rules, Steve knows. They’re things he’d be happy to do, no questions asked. But something about the way Hop says them makes his chest get tight again, and he isn’t sure why.

Maybe Hopper can tell, though, because he says his next words even more softly. “Me caring about you—it isn’t conditional. I’ll still want you around even if you break those rules or find some other way to piss me off. Which you probably will, because that’s just how life works. We’re both stubborn people. God, the two of us and El—” He laughs slightly. “Hell of a group to have living together in this small

of a space. But my point is,” he continues, growing serious again, “there’s nothing you could do—*nothing*—that’s gonna make me give up on you. You’re sorta stuck with me, kid.”

Steve just looks at him, too overwhelmed to say anything back. Hopper holds his gaze steadily, patiently. Finally he swallows hard and speaks, trying to keep the shaking in his voice to a minimum. “Hop? I—” *I love you*, he wants to say, but the words aren’t quite there yet. They will be, in time. For now, he settles for, “I really care about you, too.”

Hop smiles at him, looking almost tearful himself. He reaches an arm out as if to clasp Steve’s shoulder, but instead—Steve isn’t sure which one of them initiates it—it becomes an embrace. Steve leans forward, pressing his forehead to Hop’s shoulder, and feels a warm hand cupping the back of his neck. He breathes in deeply. Lets the air back out in a slow, steady exhale.

He’s stuck with Hopper. He doesn’t mind.

Author's Note:

thank you for reading!! you can find me on tumblr @
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